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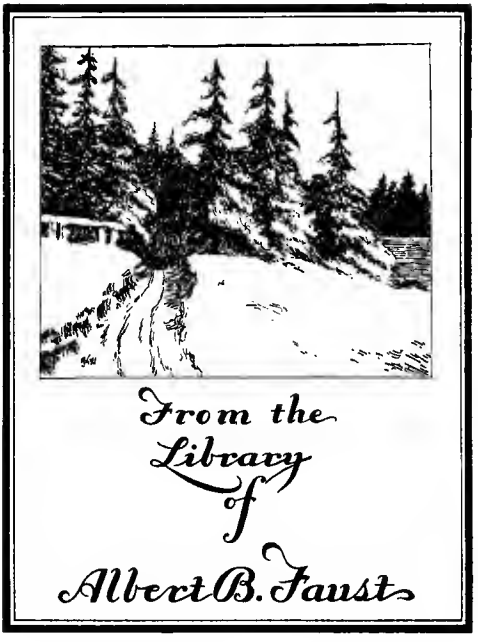

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Some Sources of Sealsfield

OTTO HELLER

Reprinted from MODERN PHILOLOGY, Vol. VII, No. 4, April, 1910

PUBLISHED BY
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, CHICAGO
Foreign Agents: *London:* LUZAC & Co.; *Leipzig:* OTTO HARRASSOWITZ

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SOME SOURCES OF SEALSFIELD

In *Modern Language Notes* (XXIII, No. 6) I pointed out the source of the first chapter of *Lebensbilder aus der westlichen Hemisphäre*, erster Teil (the separate title of the novel is *George Howard's, Esq., Brautfahrt*). At that time I again called attention to Sealsfield's evident familiarity with the American *Unterhaltungslektüre*, pastime fiction, of the twenties of the nineteenth century.

By diligent quest along lines mapped out by me, my wife has succeeded in unearthing a considerable number of sources from which beyond a doubt Sealsfield drew directly and copiously for his pictures of American life. Some of these are herewith presented in the hope that students of the great German-American, now the subject of fast-increasing interest, may be enlisted in a general exploration of the field. Sealsfield's relations to his sources vary widely, from freest adaptation to wholesale adoption, from a wholly legitimate *rifacimento* to full-fledged and inexcusable plagiarism in the form of mechanical translation, sometimes vaguely acknowledged. In these notes the relation will be indicated for each case under consideration. Postl's versions are taken up in the order of their publication.

Tokeah (1829)

The Indian novel *Tokeah* was Sealsfield's first attempt at extended narrative. The romance was published anonymously, in Philadelphia, in 1829,[1] reprinted in London in the same year under an altered title, and several years later refashioned into the first of Sealsfield's German novels: *Der Legitime und die Republikaner* (1833). The provenience of *Tokeah* is traced by Mrs. Heller to a short story by "Alcanzor," contained in the *Saturday Evening Post* IV, No. 40, Oct. 1, 1825, and reprinted in the *Edwardsville* (Illinois) *Spectator*, VII, No. 16 (December 17, 1825). The plot of the tale, which bears the title "The Indian of the Falls' Valley, or The Foundling Maid," is identical with that of *Tokeah*. In both stories we have

[1] See the writer's "Bibliographical Notes on Charles Sealsfield," *Modern Language Review*, III, No. 4, pp. 360 ff.

the richly clad infant brought on a stormy winter's night by an Indian chief to the tavern in the wilderness kept by Major John Copeland and his wife, a rugged and uneducated but most kindly and honest backwoods pair. Under the guidance of these foster parents and the Indian chieftain, who claims the foundling after a few years and brings her up as his daughter, the girl develops into a paragon of beauty, grace, virtue, wisdom, and culture. Her description in both stories is almost maudlin in its sentimentality. She falls in love with, and marries, a noble youth named Arthur. The heroine's real father turns up at last (in the earlier sketch he is a British officer, in the more elaborate version a Spanish grandee) and the recognition and identification are effected by the favorite and infallible amulet method. In many other points of minor importance the two stories show identity or strong resemblance. As for the higher literary qualities, they are conspicuously absent in both. Sealsfield's English diction appears colorless, and the phraseology throughout *Tokeah* stereotyped. On the whole, however, it is so free from the stilted artificiality of the magazine tale that one is not tempted to believe that "Alcanzor" was an early pen-name of Charles Sealsfield. As for the general conception of Indian character, *Tokeah* shares with the "Foundling Maid" the gushing sentimentality with which the noble red man was regarded in the age of Chateaubriand and Fenimore Cooper; a form of conventional falsehood from which our author soon recoiled with an almost unprecedented vehemence. While the realism of Indian life even in *Der Legitime* leaves very much to be desired, in all other respects this ultimate transformation of that flimsy and hueless newspaper sketch into a composition full of coherent interest and vivid color challenges our admiration.

George Howard's, Esq., Brautfahrt (1834)

CHAP. II

The second chapter of *George Howard* (2d ed., pp. 46–91; 3d ed., pp. 52–98) bears the heading "Eine Nacht an den Ufern des Tennessee." The first portion, as is known, corresponds closely to the English sketch, "A Night on the Banks of the Tennessee," previously contributed by our author to the *New York Mirror and Ladies' Gazette* (October 31 and November 7, 1829). The remainder

of the chapter describes a political rally, a stump speech by the shirt-sleeve politician Bob Shags being a central feature. Mrs. Heller points out the unmistakable model for this comical harangue. It is found in a sketch entitled "Barney Blinn," published over the signature of "The Wanderer" in the *Illinois Intelligencer*, Vandalia, September 15, 1827 (XI, No. 24, whole No. 544), and there credited to the *Augusta* (Ga.) *Chronicle*. The sketch, under the motto: "'My voice is still for War'—Cato," begins with the description of a rough and typically western tavern.[1] In both stories an accidental visitor at the caucus is saved from rough handling by the grace of the candidate for election, who recognizes in the stranger an old acquaintance.

The speeches of Blinn and Shags are extremely similar in form and argument. In both cases the anti-Adams meeting ends in a riot caused by the discovery in its midst of an Adams man. The misjoined rhetoric of Blinn and Shags abounds in parallel passages: the same puns, mispronunciations, and ridiculous folk-etymologic perversions, as Creeks for Greeks, Ministration for Administration, Jimmaky for Jamaica (rum). Concurrences like the following cannot be accidental. Barney Blinn: "One Colonel [colonial] Trade which is one of your very rankest colitioners." A little further on "Ginral Government" is spoken of as though it were an individual. *George Howard*, p. 86, 2d ed: "einen Ginral Tariff, der einer der tollsten Aristokraten ist." Or Barney Blinn: "if he ha'nt more real blood in his little finger than would swim a horse." *George Howard*, p. 72: "der mehr reelles Blut im kleinen Finger hat als ein Pferd zu schwemmen hinreichen würde."

In the present instance the reproduction for once answers the pattern closely in technical respects, and our source, despite its obscurity, assumes a marked significance as yielding some of those elements which Sealsfield used for a wholly novel and unique articulation of the American manner of being. Yet the possibility of Barney Blinn being a product of Sealsfield's own pen is also worth considering.

[1] From which, by the way, the following details were purloined verbatim for *Tokeah:* "Over the door was nailed an old sign, embellished with the words (more like Egyptian hieroglyphics) 'Entertainment for men and beasts' and on the side of the house written with chalk 'Whiskey'—'Brandy'—'Tobacco'—'Post Office.'"

CHAP. III

The superscription of the third chapter of *George Howard* is "Der Kindesräuber" (2d ed., pp. 92–132; 3d ed., pp. 98–139). This harrowing tale of kidnaping and murder was founded on facts, as is averred in a footnote: "Ueber die so eben angeführte Tatsache, die sich zu Ende des Jahres 1825 zugetragen, findet man in allen Zeitungen des Mississippi-Staates ausführliche Berichte. Der Name des unglücklichen Vaters ist beibehalten." Although the date given by Sealsfield appears to be erroneous, the actual event cannot well be questioned, since it was treated as a *cause célèbre* by newspapers all over the country. The crime must have occurred in the winter of 1826–27. My collaborator came across the story in the *Illinois Intelligencer*, Vandalia, August 25, 1827 (XI, No. 21, whole No. 541), where it is given under the title "The Lost Child." The article purports to be reprinted from the *Western Magazine and Review*, May, 1827. This, however, is a misnomer for the *Western Monthly Review*, of which further mention will have to be made as a source of Sealsfield. The article appeared in Vol. I, No. 1 (May, 1827) of this short-lived periodical, under the same title. A comparison between this seemingly authentic press account, "gleaned from the journals, ... and corrected from a long conversation with the sheriff at Natchez," and the finished product of Sealsfield demonstrates the provenience of "Der Kindesräuber" from this particular account of the tragedy. The taking over of such material was as legitimate as it was conducive to the central aim of the *Lebensbilder*. The boldness of the early realist is here kept in fine balance by his artistic reserve. Not one fictitious detail was added to a piece of truth which to the romance-fed German reader must have indeed appeared stranger than fiction, in its stern simplicity. And yet under the touch of genius, the human pathos of the naked fact was raised to a power unattainable for the mere reporter, be he of the matter-of-fact or of the sensational species.

Christophorus Bärenhäuter[1]

The burlesque story of "Christophorus Bärenhäuter im Amerikanerlande" undoubtedly owed its inclusion among the *Transatlantische*

[1] For the bibliography of this story see the writer's "Bibliographical Notes on Charles Sealsfield," quoted above.

Reiseskizzen to our author's desire, as voiced in the preface to the *Kajütenbuch*, to contrast against one another different types of nationality. The story is practically out of reach for modern readers, since the first edition of the *Reiseskizzen* survives in but very few copies, and from subsequent editions (renamed *Lebensbilder*) the "Bärenhäuter" extravaganza was barred out, probably because it would have severed the thread which connects that long-drawn succession of novels. In a not too definite way, Sealsfield indicated the origin of his story, yet with both original and reproduction steeped in utter oblivion, the lateness of the identification is not to be wondered at. The facetious preamble to "Bärenhäuter" asserts the authenticity of the yarn by referring to the archives of Toffelsville, viz., an old family Bible, and then proceeds: "Die Quellen unserer Geschichte sind daher über jeden Verdacht erhaben, und ihre Authentizität wird noch mehr durch den Umstand erhöht, dass ein Extrakt von dem mehrerwähnten Archive seinen Weg, durch welche Mittel, ist uns unbekannt, in das Magazin eines westlichen Predigers (Flint, der zehn Jahre Prediger im Mississippitale gewesen ist) nun bedauerlichermassen verblichen, gefunden hat," etc.

Although only three volumes of Flint's magazine saw the light of day, the search for a complete file proved long and difficult. The vandal recklessness of earlier America in dealing with records of its civilization is again illustrated by the fact that even in Cincinnati, where that periodical was published, only one out of the three volumes appears to have been preserved. Mrs. Heller located the original of "Christophorus Bärenhäuter" in Vol. I, No. 7, of *The Western Monthly Review*, edited by Timothy Flint, Cincinnati, November 1827. It runs from pp. 384–93 under the caption "Jemima O'Keefy—A Sentimental Tale," and was probably the editor's own work. Sealsfield has translated the English text with great fidelity, yet managed much to improve the story, particularly by touching up the silhouettes of the principal figures in a way calculated to bring them more distinctly into relief. The humor of the story, too, is heightened by his touches. The many curious features for which Sealsfield's style is noted manifest themselves here in an inchoate yet unmistakable fashion.

Das Kajütenbuch (1841)

"Der Fluch Kishogues oder der verschmähte Johannistrunk,"[1] a short story, belonging to the same grotesque genre as "Christophorus Bärenhäuter," is told by the Irish servant Phelim, at the Cabin symposium. It follows directly after the masterly narrative "Die Prairie am Jacinto," and fills, in the first edition, pp. 141–65 of the second volume (2d ed., pp. 121–44).

In substance it is hardly more than an elaborate anecdote, the *realia* of which and the *Galgenhumor*—literally taken—plainly bespeak an Irish origin. In the prefatory letter to the publishers (ostensibly written for the first edition, but not printed till the second) our author makes the fictitious editor of his works explain, on the "great unknown's" authority:

> Auch bemerkt er ausdrücklich, ... dass sämtliche Incidents sich auf Tatsachen gründen, etwa mit Ausnahme Kishogue's, den er als aus einer fremden Feder geflossen erklärt. Ob diese Feder eine freundlich bekannte, ... wird nicht angegeben. Wahrscheinlich gefiel ihm die wilde Skizze irländischen Lebens und Sterbens, und er nahm sie auf, um die Gegensätze zwischen amerikanischem und wieder englischem und irischem Nationalcharakter mehr hervorzuheben, so den zweiten Titel "nationale Charakteristiken" zu rechtfertigen.

It is odd that the original of "Kishogue" has so long escaped identification, inasmuch as it happens to have been the work of a writer very popular in his day and even at this time deemed worthy of a complete and splendidly appareled edition of his writings. He was Samuel Lover, the Irish poet (1799–1868). "The Curse of Kishogue" (the alternative title is Sealsfield's) formed part of the *Legends and Stories of Ireland*, illustrated by the author and published in 1831. It is easily accessible now in *The Collected Writings of Samuel Lover* (Treasure Trove edition, Boston, Little, Brown & Co. [1903], VIII, 133–53; "The Curse of Kishogue," *Legends and Stories of Ireland*, second series, pp. 146–53). The translation, again, is on the whole close and exact. Such changes as appear were evidently dictated by Sealsfield's dictional idiosyncrasies, now fully developed, and they detract from the concise and grim comicality of the original Irish tale. This applies especially to the incessant repetition, with Sealsfield a favorite form of padding.

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[1] For sources of other parts of Sealsfield's *chef-d'œuvre* see P. Bordier, "Sealsfield, ses idées, ses sources, d'après le *Kajütenbuch*," *Revue germanique*, V, No. 3, pp. 273–300 and No. 4, pp. 370–421.